People, Places, and Things
Volume I

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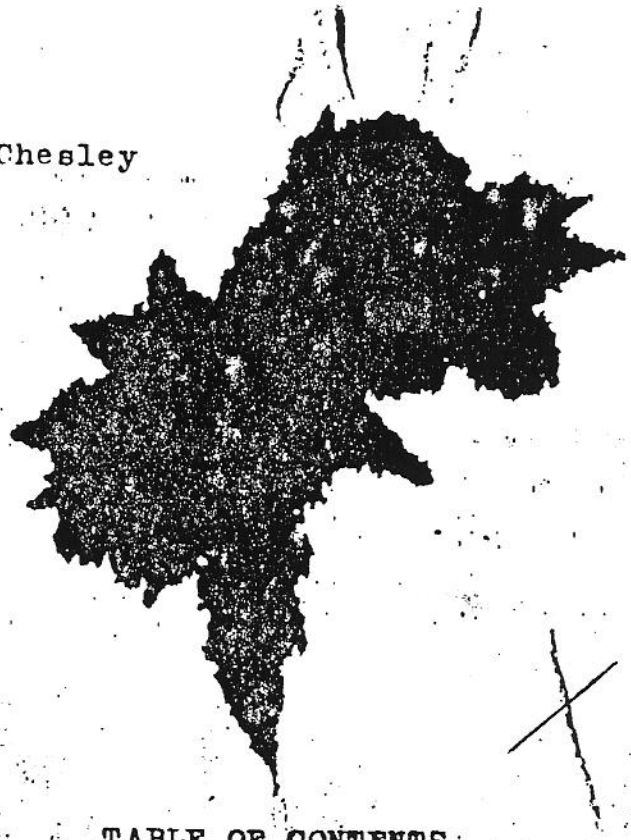

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The Hotel at the End of the Road

"Faster!" Tommy Riviera said. "Faster!"

"I'm hitting 85 now," Kelso Black said.

"The cops are right behind us," Riviera said. "Put it up to 90." He leaned out the window. Behind the fleeing car was a police car, with siren wailing and red light flashing.

"I'm hitting the side road ahead," Black grunted. He turned the wheel and the car turned into the winding road spraying gravel.

The uniformed policeman scratched his head. "Where did they go?"

His partner frowned. "I don't know. They just – disappeared."

"Look," Black said. "Lights ahead."

"It's a hotel," Riviera said wonderingly. "Out on this wagon track a hotel! If that don't beat all! The police'll never look for us there."

Black, unheeding of the car's tires, stamped on the brake. Riviera reached into the back seat and got a black bag. They walked in.

The hotel looked just like a scene out of the early 1900's. Riviera rang the bell impatiently. An old man shuffled out. "We want a room," Black said.

The man stared at them silently.

"A room," Black repeated.

The man turned around to go back into his office.

"Look, old man," Tommy Riviera said. "I don't take that from anybody." He pulled out his thirty-eight. "Now you give us a room."

The man looked ready to keep on going, but at last he said: "Room five. End of the hall."

He gave them no register to sign, so they went up. The room was barren except for an iron double bed, a cracked mirror, and soiled wallpaper.

"Aah, what a crummy joint," Black said in disgust. "I'll bet there's enough cockroaches here to fill a five-gallon can."

The next morning when Riviera woke up, he couldn't get out of bed. He couldn't move a muscle. He was paralyzed. Just then the old man came into view. He had a needle which he put into Black's arms.

"So you're awake," he said. "My, my, you two are the first additions to my museum in twenty-five years. But you'll be well preserved. And you won't die.

"You'll go with the rest of my collection of living mummies. Nice specimens."

Tommy Riviera couldn't even express his horror.

I've Got To Get Away!

"What am I doing here?" Suddenly I wondered. I was terribl frightened. I could remember nothing, but here I was, working in an atomic factory assembly line. All I knew was that I was Denny Phillips. It was as if I had just awakened from a slumber. The place was guarded, and the guards had guns. They looked like they meant business. There were others working, and they looked like zombies. They looked like they were prisoners.

But it didn't matter. I had to find out who I was.....what was doing.

I had to get away!

I started across the floor. One of the guards yelled, "Get back there!"

I ran across the room, bowled over a guard, and ran out th door. I heard gun blasts and I knew they were shooting at me. But the driving thought persisted:

I've got to get away!

There was another set of guards blocking the other door. It looked like I was trapped, until I saw a boom swing down. I grabbed it and was pulled over three hundred feet to the next lan ing. But it was no good. There was a guard there. He shot at me. felt all weak and dizzy....I fell into a great dark pit...

One of the guards took off his hat and scratched his head. "I dunno, Joe, I just dunno. Progress is a great thing...but that x-238A...Denny Phillips, name...they're great robots...but they g haywire, now and then, and it seems like they was looking for something...almost human. Oh well."

A truck drove away, and the sign on its side said: "ACME ROBOT REPAIR".

Two weeks later, Denny Phillips was back on the job...blan look in his eyes. But suddenly...

His eyes become clear...and the overwhelming thought comes to him: I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY!!"

The Thing At The Bottom of the Well

Oglethorpe Crater was an ugly, mean little wretch. He dearly loved plaguing the dog and cat, pulling the wings from flies, and watching worms squirm as he slowly pulled them apart. (This lost its fun when he heard worms feel no pain.)

But his mother, fool as she was, was blind to his faults and sadistic traits. One day the cook threw open the door in near-hysterics as Oglethorpe and Mommy came home from a movie.

"That awful little boy tied a rope across the cellar stairs so when I went down to get potatoes I fell and almost killed myself!" she screamed.

"Don't believe her! Don't believe her! She hates me!" cried Oglethorpe, tears springing into his eyes. And poor little Oglethorpe began sobbing as if his little heart would break.

Mommy fired the cook, and Oglethorpe, dear little Oglethorpe, went up to his room where he poked pins in his dog, Spotty. When Mommy asked why Spotty was crying, Oglethorpe said he got some glass in his foot. He said he would pull it out. Mommy thought dear little Oglethorpe a good Samaritan.

Then one day, while Oglethorpe was in the field looking for more things to torture, he spied a deep, dark well. He called down, thinking he'd hear an echo.

"Hello!"

But a soft voice called up, "Hello, Oglethorpe."

Oglethorpe looked down, but he could see nothing. "Who are you," Oglethorpe asked.

"Come on down," said the voice. "And we'll have jolly fun."

So Oglethorpe went down.

The day passed and Oglethorpe didn't come back. Mommy called the police and a manhunt was formed. For over a month they hunted for dear little Oglethorpe. Just when they were about to give up, they found Oglethorpe in a well, dead as a door-nail.

But how he must have died!

His arms were pulled out, like people pull flies' wings. Pins had been stuck in his eyes, and there were other tortures too horrible to mention.

As they covered his body (what was left of it) and trouped away, it actually seemed that they heard laughter coming from the bottom of the well.

The Stranger

Kelso Black laughed.

He laughed until his sides were splitting and the bottle of cheap whiskey he held clenched in his hands slopped on the floor.

Dumb cops! It had been so easy. And now he had fifty grand in his pockets. The guard was dead--but it was his fault! He got in the way.

With a laugh Kelso Black raised the bottle to his lips.

That was when he heard it. Footsteps on the stairs that led to the attic where he was holed up.

He drew his pistol. The door swung open.

The stranger wore a black coat and a hat pulled over his eyes. "Hello, hello," he said. "Kelso, I've been watching you. You please me immensely." The stranger laughed, and it sent a thrill of horror through him.

"Who are you?"

The man laughed again. "You know me. I know you. We made a pact about an hour ago, the moment you shot that guard."

"Get out!" Black's voice rose shrilly. "Get out! Get out!

"It's time for you to come, Kelso," the stranger said softly. "After all--we have a long way to go."

The stranger took off his coat and hat. Kelso Black looke into that Face.

He screamed.

Kelso Black screamed and screamed and screamed.

But the stranger just laughed, and in a moment, the room was silent. And empty.

But it smelled strongly of brimstone.

The Cursed Expedition

"Well," said Jimmy Keller, looking across to the gantry to where the rocket rested in the middle of the desert. A lonely wind blew across the desert, and Hugh Bullford said, "Yeah. It's about time to leave for Venus. Why? Why do we want to go to Venus?"

"I don't know," Keller said. "I just don't know."

The rocket ship touched down on Venus. Bullford checked the air and said in amazed tones, "Why, it's good old type-Earth air! Perfectly breathable."

They went out, and it was Kellers turn for amazement. "Why, it's just like spring on earth! Everything's lush and green and beautiful. Why...it's Paradise!"

They ran out. The fruits were exotic and delicious, the temperature perfect. When night fell, they slept outside. "I'm going to call it the Garden of Eden," said Keller enthusiastically.

Bullford stared into the fire. "I don't like this place, Jimmy. It feels all wrong. There's something...evil about it."

"Your space-happy," Keller scoffed. "Sleep it off!"

The next morning James Keller was dead.

There was a look of horror on his face that Bullford never hoped to see again.

After the burial, Bullford called Earth. He got no reply. The radio was dead. Bullford took it apart and put it together. There was nothing wrong with it, but the fact remained: it didn't work.

Bullford's worry doubled itself. He ran outside. The landscape was the same, pleasant and happy. But Bullford could see the evil in it.

"You killed him!" he cried. "I know it!"

Suddenly the ground opened up and it slithered toward him. In near panic, he ran back to the ship. But not before he got a piece of soil.

He analyzed the soil, and then panic took him. Venus was alive.

Suddenly the space ship tilted and went over. Bullford screamed. But the soil closed over it, and almost seemed to lick its lips.

Then it reset itself, waiting for the next victim....

The Other Side of the Fog

As Pete Jacobs stepped out, the fog immediately swallowed up his house, and he could see nothing but the white blanket all around him. It gave him the wierd feeling of being the last man in the world.

Suddenly Pete felt dizzy. His stomach did a flip-flop. He felt like a person in a falling elevator. Then it passed, and he walked on. The fog began to clear, and Pete's eyes opened wide with fright, awe, and wonder.

He was in the middle of the city.

But the nearest city was forty miles away!

But what a city!! Pete had never seen anything like it. Graceful buildings with high spires seemed to reach to the sky. People walked along on moving conveyer belts.

The cornerstone on a skyscraper read April, 17, 2007.

Pete had walked into the future. But how?

Suddenly Pete was frightened. Horribly, terribly frightened. He didn't belong here. He couldn't stay. He ran after the receeding Fog.

A policeman in a strange uniform called angrily. Strange cars that rode six inches or so off the ground narrowly missed hitting him. But Pete succeeded. He ran back into the Fog, and soon everything was blanked out.

Then the feeling came again. That weird feeling of falling ...then the Fog began to clear.

It looked like home...

Suddenly there was an earsplitting screach. He turned to see a huge prehistoric brontosaurus lumbering toward him. The desire to kill was in his small, beady eyes.

Terrifyed, he ran into the Fog again...

The next time the Fog closes in on you, and you hear hurried footsteps running through the whiteness...call out.

That would be Pete Jacobs, trying to find his side of the Fog...

Help the poor guy.

Never Look Behind You

George Jacobs was closing his office, when an old women felt free to walk right in.

Hardly anyone walked through his door these days. The people hated him. For fifteen years he'd picked the people's pockets clean of money. No one had ever been able to hook him on a charge. But back to our little story.

The old woman that came in had an ugly scar on her left cheek. Her clothes were mostly filthy rags and other crude material. Jacobs was counting his money.

"There! Fifty-thousand, nine hundred and seventy-three dollars and sixty-two cents." Jacobs always liked to be precise.

"Indeed a lot of money," she spoke up. "Too bad you won't be able to spend it."

Jacobs turned around.

"Why--who are you?" he asked in half surprize. "What right have you to spy on me?"

The woman didn't answer. She held up her boney hand. There was a flashof fire on his throat; and a scream. Then, with a final gurgle, George Jacobs died.

"I wonder what--or who--could have killed him?" said a young man.

"I'm glad he's gone," said another.

That one was lucky.

He didn't look behind him.

THE END